

INSTRUMENTS OF EVALUATING SMALL GROUP PROCESS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Finding instruments for the evaluation of small group process has been an easy task because within the area of measurement of group variables there are at least ten areas of concern: group type, methodology, decision-making procedures, communication patterns, leadership influence, amount of time spent, group size, group composition, feedback, and group structure.. While in the area of individual change within group, there are at least nine areas of concern: sensitivity, self-concept, self-awareness, congruence, risk-taking, task effectiveness, problem-solving, conformity, and potential dangers to the individual.<sup>1</sup> Each of these areas has at least one school of thought concerned with obtaining reliable instruments and with measuring findings, thus, giving some idea of the wealth of material available.

The presence of so many available instruments and the almost limitless possible types of relations that can be measured makes the task of presenting instruments with some continuity seemingly hopeless. However, having found from past experience that the greater depth of research utilized, the

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<sup>1</sup>Malcolm and Hulda Knowles, Introduction to Group Dynamics (New York: Association Press, 1972), pp. 67-71.

more simpler and clearer choices become. Thus, there seems to be four primary types of measurable relations going on within a group: a social awareness, a communication, a presence of power and a task interdependence. The guidelines that served in the selection of three instruments to measure these primary relations were: an understanding that evaluation was a scientific basis for understanding what was happening within the group, that for general usage and for maximum value to individual members it must be simple, that emphasis must be on useability rather than on information gathering, that it must be easy to administer and easily tabulated, that they must build upon each other in providing information, and finally the selection, usage, the instrument and information gained must belong to the group. "In all instances the data collected are the property of the group, and use of the data is planned by the group."<sup>2</sup> I, therefore, have serious doubts as to the usefulness of instruments that are used within groups to gather clinical information and are not returned to the group to facilitate group growth.

With these criteria in view and limited by the allowable length of this paper, I have chosen three instruments that are simple, can be used by any chaplain or other member of the group with little preparation, flexible enough to be used with any age group, that can provide quick results back to the group

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<sup>2</sup>Leland P. Bradford, Jack R. Gibb, and Kenneth D. Benne, ed., T-Group Theory and Laboratory Method (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1967), p. 42..

for their consideration, and that can build to provide a good overview as to what is transpiring within the group.

## CHAPTER II

### THREE INSTRUMENTS FOR EVALUATING

#### The Sociogram

The nature of human response within the group process reveals that members identify positively or negatively with certain individuals more than with other members and that these relationships will have a direct influence upon the growth and life of the group. Especially is this important since people tend to agree with people they like and disagree with people they dislike.<sup>3</sup> The sociogram seeks to determine these affective relationships by measuring the likes and dislikes of group members. That is with a questionnaire, simple, variable, adaptable, and which provides great variety of alternatives in its form and setting.

The test itself may ask for an ordered list of persons within the group with whom a member would like to perform some activity. The questions are then tabulated and the results are reproduced as a geometric picture with the members of the group represented by symbols and their choices shown as lines with directional arrows. The resulting pattern will visualize the presence of highly chosen, unchosen, underchosen, isolate, and

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<sup>3</sup>Knowles, Group Dynamics, p. 48.

rejected members (if negative choices are part of the questionnaire). These patterns need to be known by the group so it can deal effectively with its own internal hinderances. The sociogram has suffered from its users because:

Instead of being taken as one kind of datum about group structure, the sociometric diagram has often been accepted as portraying the essence of group life. . . . Sociometric attention to affective relationships has resulted in neglect of instrumental or task-oriented activity.<sup>4</sup>

Gaining information from the individual is only one means of obtaining the desired data for group process evaluation. Direct observational techniques can supply needed information which is especially valuable because what is observed and recorded is fact apart from rationalization. Observing provides opportunity for evaluation of shy and nonverbal members. The factors that must be considered when choosing observational techniques are: the loss of the contribution of the observer, the concern often generated when members know that they are under observation, the potential for interpretation or bias by the observer, and the selective nature of classifications by the observer. Two effective methods of observational gathering of evaluation material are the Interaction Process Analysis and The Lines of Communication.

#### Interaction Process Analysis

The Interaction Process Analysis was developed by Robert F. Bales of the Harvard Laboratory of Social Relations and it

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<sup>4</sup>Michael S. Olmsted, The Small Group (New York: Random House, 1959), p. 98.

was the first instrument . . .

self-consciously developed as a general-purpose descriptive and diagnostic procedure designed to produce theoretically relevant measures . . . thus encouraging the development of empirical norms.<sup>5</sup>

Observationally orientated, it also has as its emphasis problem solving and problem process. Bales was stimulated in his development by group psychotherapy, role playing situations, and his belief that every act of behavior must be considered in relation to the group. This consideration applies equally to task-oriented and to affective behavior, and attempts to abstract from the raw materials of observation the problem-solving relevance of group acts..

Since every act can be fitted into some structural category, Bales sought to develop a system for on-the-spot concurrent recording of behavior. His system was reworked until twelve categories remained that covered the adaptive and the integrated functions that are essential properties of group activity. These twelve categories are divided into three major areas: the positive social-emotional area, the task area, and the negative social-emotional area. The twelve categories are studied by the observer until he is thoroughly familiar with the area covered by each category. The observer then analyzes each interaction as it occurs and continuously records each act in the category which seems to best fit the thrust of the act. There are some problems that must be considered when this

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<sup>5</sup>Robert F. Bales, "Interaction Process Analysis," International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, 1968, VII, 465.



instrument is utilized: the neglect of act quality, the problem of scoring the act that may have two functions, and the observers subjective judgments must be assumed to be correct. These problems can be minimized if the observer reports his findings directly back to the group for corrections.

This is the most refined and exhausted observational technique thus far developed and serves as a valuable tool.<sup>6</sup>

### THE LINES OF COMMUNICATION

Apart from task and leadership, there must also be taken into account the operational communication network in a group. Communication acts become important because they develop into routine, self-perpetuating patterns. An awareness of patterns can help prevent members from becoming victims of such reinforcement. The presence and recognition of patterns in communication can be evaluated by more than twenty-six different instruments which record only the verbal patterns of communication.

The structural process observable in groups seemed best explained by the existence of a group communication network. This assumption led Alex Bavelas to apply the principles of topology to group behavior with a series of laboratory experiments that restricted communication channels and measured the effect on group morale and production.<sup>7</sup> These studies dramatized

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<sup>6</sup>Olmsted, The Small Group, p. 125.

<sup>7</sup>Bertram H. Raven, "Group Performance," International Encyclopedia of Social Sciences, 1968, VI, 291.

the importance of structure in communication and acknowledge the individual member to be an acting entity.

Much of the group work is gathering, interpreting, and evaluating messages which depend, for success, upon the unhindered, effective flow of information. The application of the observations of Bavelas provides the group a view of its network and the opportunity to change its pattern if desirable.

Evaluating communication networks reveals particular participation patterns and requires an observer graphically recording who communicates with whom. Circles represent the members, lines with arrowheads and notations show direction of communication, and short lines represent communication to the entire group. The chart records who is talking, who is commenting or questioning, and the nonverbal communication of members who are not talking as to their interest or apathy. A chart examination reveals the pattern of handling tasks within the group: one central leader upon whom the other members focus attention and communicate, the presence of a series of successive evaluators as the information proceeds to the leader and the absence of a recognized leader as evidenced by evenly crisscrossed lines. Other designs appearing may be the kite, slash, and circle. In all patterns the most central person is the one who needs the least number of communication links to interact with all other members; this centralized leadership pattern exhibits speed in accomplishing the assigned task. Once the group organizes into a stable interpersonal relationship ". . . the differences among the nets largely disappear. A

group with a stable interpersonal organization performs comparably in all three nets."<sup>8</sup> Thus, the aim should be toward a group with the highest morale which is directly related to the access of each individual to open participation.

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<sup>8</sup>Barry E. Collins and Harold Guetzkow, A Social Psychology of Group Processes for Decision-Making ( New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1964), p. 65.

## CHAPTER III

### APPLICATION

Introducing evaluation into small groups that are under the direction of a chaplain can provide opportunities for growth if the evaluation belongs to the group as suggested in the introduction. Thus, a sociogram would be administered to the small group shortly after they become acquainted with the purpose of facilitating the growth of the group. After drawing the sociogram, it is returned to the group where the group takes it into discussion. A discussion of who has been chosen or not chosen, as well as the reasons behind the choosings would be an awakening to the group and an evaluation among the members as to how they make choices and what they have communicated about themselves.

After a thorough discussion of the sociogram with all its immediate implications, the observational use of the Interaction Process Analysis would be used. This would be to discover any difference between the group task leader and the socio-emotional leader. An observation of which persons give reassurance, smooth over relations, provide tension release and facilitate, will reveal the socio-emotional leader. In this same observational period, persons are noted who give instruction, information, and draw conclusions or consensus. These are task

leaders. The observer then reports back to the group the findings of the observation and in the discussion to follow, the results are compared as to whether the same person is to be found in both groups and how the results compare with those obtained in the preceeding sociogram. This can open up the discussion as to the cost and attributes of being either the socio-emotional leader or the task leader.

Upon an understanding of the leading mechanisms within the group, it is important to consider the nature of the communication within the group. This can be done by observing who receives the most communication, who gives the most communication and what kind of a communication pattern is formed within the group. Is the pattern centralized with all information passing through one person, such as might be found with the form of the spokes of a wheel? Is it linear with communication passing along a straight line? Is it a modified linear so that it forms a Y when pictured or is the communication within the group uncentralized in form, forming a circle with unlimited communication interaction? This information is then returned to the group for input that might show the observation to be in error by pointing out that the person who was noted as having little input was considered by the group to have been emotionally involved and very supportive in a nonverbal manner, or that the communication value of a member who had a moderate amount of interaction is considered by the group to be superior to that given by the total of the sources of the greater communication. Again the final results must be compared by the group with the

information gained by the preceeding two evaluations.

It is noted that the changes and revaluations made in the instruments used will confuse the neat graphs and drawings that the chaplain submits to the group. However, the value in the use of these methods of evaluation is not with the statistical results that are obtained but with the facilitative value that is brought to the group process as they seek to point out the nature of what is happening within the group process and bring to the group possible changes that it desires to make. The evaluations are tools and their value is only in proportion to their utilization in the "growth" of the group as the group defines "growth."

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